Supporting and Rewarding Social Service Workers: Key Drivers of Motivation and Professional Satisfaction

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Abstract **– This study explores the experiences of social service workers who provide care to individuals living with dementia, focusing on how support and recognition affects their professional motivation, satisfaction, and retention. Previous research has emphasized the high emotional and physical demands in dementia care and the importance of organizational support mechanisms, such as supervision, open communication, and recognition. This study aims to answer the following research question: What forms of support and appreciation do social service workers perceive as most influential in their motivation and long-term commitment to the profession? The hypothesis assumed that both financial and non-financial factors—including interpersonal relationships and workplace environment—significantly impact employee satisfaction and professional identity. A qualitative design was employed, using semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of ten Czech social service workers (7 women, 3 men) aged 24–55, with two to ten years of experience in dementia care. Thematic analysis revealed that workers most value open communication with management, emotional appreciation from families, material benefits, and a supportive work environment. While participants acknowledged the importance of non-financial recognition, they unanimously highlighted insufficient financial compensation as a major source of dissatisfaction. These findings underscore the necessity of integrated support strategies to sustain a motivated and resilient social services workforce.**

Keywords **– Appreciation, employee support, motivation, social services.**

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1. Introduction

The demographic structure of the European population has been undergoing significant changes in recent decades, with far-reaching implications for the social, economic and health systems of individual countries. The ageing of the population is characterised by an increasing proportion of people aged 65 and over, due to a combination of low fertility, increasing life expectancy and other demographic factors. According to Eurostat's interactive publication *Demography of Europe - 2023 edition* [1], the share of the population aged 65 and over in the European Union will increase from 16% in 2002 to 21% in 2022. This trend is evident in most EU Member States, with some countries facing a faster ageing of their populations than others.

In 2023, Italy and Portugal had the highest proportion of seniors in Europe, with those aged 65 and over making up 24% of the total population. This high share can be attributed to low fertility, high life expectancy and limited migration of the younger population. Countries such as Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and Finland face similarly high proportions of older people, while at the same time facing increasing demands on their pension and health systems. The average share of older people in the European Union is around 21.3% in 2023, but there are significant differences between countries. Countries with higher incomes and better health systems have longer life expectancy, which contributes to a higher proportion of older people.

At the other end of the spectrum are countries such as Iceland, Luxembourg and Turkey, where the share of people aged over 65 is below 15%. In the case of Turkey, the young demographic structure plays a key role [2].

As the number of seniors increases, the number of people with dementia also increases. In the Czech Republic and Europe in general, the number of newly diagnosed cases of dementia is increasing by 5.4% per year, with this number doubling approximately every 20 to 25 years [3]. This development will have a significant impact not only on the economy but also on the social sphere. The social services system will thus be forced to implement major changes, both in the area of financing and legislation, as well as in the issues of quality of services, material and technical equipment and staffing standards.

In 2017, a total of 17 856 people stayed in residential social services for people living with dementia in the Czech Republic, of whom 12 478 were women (i.e., 70%) and 5 376 were men. The number of clients in these facilities has been increasing over the long term, but the number of unfulfilled requests for placement has been increasing in parallel. While in 2013, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic registered 15 488 dissatisfied applications, in 2017 this number increased to 22 348, which significantly exceeded the capacity of homes with special regime [4]. The growing trend in the number of beds in these facilities is also confirmed by the Register of Social Service Providers of the Czech Republic [5], which records more than 400 registered homes with special regime with a total capacity of 23 674 beds.

Regarding the social services workforce, a study [6] reports that approximately 11 million people work in the sector in the European Union, representing 4.7% of all jobs in the EU. The sector is one of the fastest growing, with two million new jobs created in the last ten years. However, the Czech Republic is lagging somewhat behind in this growth. The number of workers in social services varies according to different sources - an analysis [4] lists 75 656 full-time equivalents, while Eurostat data from the same year speaks of 105 100 employees. Work in social services is the domain of women, who make up 81.56% of the workforce, while in some countries (e.g., Portugal, Slovakia) this share exceeds 90%. The highest proportion of men in social services is recorded in Germany (24.8%). In the Czech Republic, the 50-64 age group makes up a significant proportion of the social services workforce, accounting for approximately one third of the workforce [6].

Social services staff who care for the elderly and people with dementia face high physical and mental stress. The work is often associated with excessive workloads, staff shortages and limited access to modern technology. In the case of dementia care, the situation is even more complicated due to the progressive nature of the disease and the emotional challenges associated with caring for clients with aggressive behaviour, restlessness or in the palliative stages of the disease.

A frequently addressed topic in the context of clients and social service workers is social isolation. Social exclusion is a major issue that modern society is attempting to address [7]. It has negative impacts not only on a local level but also on a national, European, and even global scale. In today's interconnected society, it is important to recognise that social exclusion issues in other countries or on other continents will have an impact on society. Therefore, it is crucial to strive for the elimination, prevention, and combat of social exclusion through all possible means. Cooperative learning, which replaces traditional competitiveness, plays a crucial role in strengthening social bonds among students and developing their collaborative skills [8].

One of the key support mechanisms for these workers is supervision. Research emphasises that supervision enhances professional competence, promotes empathy and helps prevent burnout syndrome [9]. Supervision provides a space for emotional and professional support to help workers manage feelings of powerlessness and improve the quality of care. Effectiveness of supervision depends on the organisational culture and professional skills of individual supervisors, while the importance of emotional attachment theory in building emotional resilience within supervision processes is also crucial [10], [11]. In well-structured organisations, point to the importance of clearly stated goals and constructive feedback as key elements of effective supervision [12].

The integration of supervision, professional development and mental health support is key to maintaining the quality of care provided and the long-term sustainability of the social services workforce. This study therefore focuses on the perceptions of support and appreciation of social service workers who care for people with dementia and analyses the factors influencing their professional motivation and satisfaction.

2. Methodology

The aim of methodology section is to describe how research was conducted as well as to enhance credibility of the research. In case research is quantitative, methodology should present the way numerical data was collected and how mathematical analyses are conducted to observe, analyse, access, and test experiments and hypotheses. Qualitative research involves collection and analysis of non-numerical data (e.g.: text, video, or audio) with the aim of explaining concepts, opinions, perspectives, or personal experiences.

The aim of this research probe is to analyse the perceptions of support and appreciation from employers, families and colleagues of social service workers who provide care for people living with dementia. The study aims to identify specific forms of support, motivation and reward that contribute to their job satisfaction, performance and long-term retention in the profession.

A **qualitative research strategy** was chosen for the implementation of the research probe, which was focused on the critical evaluation of the forms and effectiveness of the support provided to social service workers [13]. Qualitative research is described as a technique that focuses on non-numerical aspects of the phenomenon under study and seeks to understand its nature and meaning from the perspective of the research participants [13]. The activities of a qualitative researcher can be compared to conducting detective work as the researcher seeks and analyses information that leads to answers to the research questions. This activity is carried out in the field, where the centre of the action is. The gathering of information and its analysis takes place over an extended period of time. The researcher chooses the place of observation of the individual and continues to observe him/her at different points in time. Data acquisition and data analysis take place simultaneously.

Specifically, the method of data collection was **semi-structured interviews**, which allowed for a deeper understanding of respondents' individual experiences and attitudes. Interview is defined as a method of collecting data about reality that involves direct verbal communication between the researcher and the respondent [14].

Interviews were conducted with a total of ten social service workers (referred to as KP1 to KP10) and were selected on the basis of their willingness to participate in the research, which may cause a selection bias in favour of those with a more positive attitude towards the employer.

The interviews focused on four key areas:

Employer support for social service workers - employer support plays a key role in ensuring the satisfaction, effectiveness and long-term retention of social service workers. This support is particularly important for workers caring for people living with dementia, where the work is both mentally and physically demanding. The attached data shows that employees particularly value benefits, helpfulness of management, a pleasant working environment and the opportunity to communicate informally with their supervisors. Despite these positive aspects, respondents also stress the need for additional measures such as more frequent joint events or more involvement of employers from higher management levels.

Key forms of support: Benefits and material support - employees perceive benefits as an important form of support. Specific benefits include, for example, the provision of a drinking plan, benefit cards for leisure activities, or access to material resources that facilitate daily work. Respondents also valued a quality work environment, such as modern equipment or newly constructed buildings. For example, a study highlights that, employees who have access to material benefits report higher levels of job satisfaction and less susceptibility to burnout syndrome [15].

Responsiveness of management and informal communication - Informal communication with supervisors was rated by respondents as a key factor in satisfaction. The opportunity for open conversation, management's interest in employees and addressing their needs contribute significantly to creating trust and a positive atmosphere in the workplace. Open communication between employees and management has a direct impact on job performance and employee loyalty [16].

Pleasant work environment - A modern and well-equipped work environment was frequently mentioned by respondents as an important motivating factor. Good quality physical facilities not only improve working conditions but also promote the psychological well-being of employees. Further, it has been proved that employees in an environment with adequate material and technical resources display higher productivity and lower stress levels [17].

Need for joint events and management involvement - Although employees generally appreciated the forms of support available, some expressed a desire for management to organize more joint events to better connect employees and supervisors. Such activities could help to foster team spirit and a greater sense of belonging among staff. The importance of teamwork and management support is found to be interconnected with higher job satisfaction and employee’s loyalty [18].

The support provided by the employer is a complex area including benefits, a supportive management approach, a quality working environment, and creating opportunities for informal interactions between employees and management. These elements are key to maintaining social workers satisfaction and minimising negative phenomena such as burnout. At the same time, despite the positive benefits of existing measures, it is clear that a greater focus on joint activities and increased employer involvement could further improve the quality of the working environment and contribute to the long-term stability of the profession.

Remuneration and motivation of employees: Remuneration and motivation of employees in social services are key factors influencing their job satisfaction, performance and long-term retention in the field. Based on the data collected, it is clear that social service workers who care for people living with dementia perceive their financial compensation as inadequate. According to all respondents, an increase in wages would be the main motivating factor. In addition, workers also value other elements of motivation such as benefits, relationships with colleagues and clients, as well as a pleasant working environment.

Key aspects of remuneration and motivation: Financial remuneration as the main motivating factor - respondents stated that direct client care is physically and psychologically demanding work that is not adequately financially rewarded. Moreover, financial rewards play a role in preventing burnout among workers in demanding professions such as social services [19]. According to respondents, an increase in pay would not only foster their motivation but also contribute to a greater sense of recognition and respect for their work.

Benefits to supplement financial remuneration - In addition to wage increases, respondents mentioned the importance of benefits such as meal vouchers, benefit cards or guaranteed drinks to simplify their daily functioning and improve their working comfort [20]. Benefits can significantly boost employee motivation and compensate for gaps in direct financial remuneration [20]. Benefits are also perceived as a sign of the employer's concern for the welfare of its workers.

Workplace relationships and their motivational potential - Strong and positive relationships with colleagues and clients were often cited by respondents as an important motivational factor. Good teamwork and good workplace relationships increase job satisfaction and create a supportive work environment. Research by shows that workers who have strong bonds with colleagues report higher levels of job satisfaction and resilience to stress [18].

Pleasant work environment - Respondents appreciated a pleasant work environment that includes modern equipment, clean and functional spaces, or a quality kitchen. A quality work environment can significantly improve employees' psychological well-being and contribute to their overall productivity [17].

The importance of non-financial motivational factors - Despite the emphasis on financial rewards, respondents emphasised that other aspects such as positive relationships with clients and their families also increase motivation. Working with clients was perceived as an important source of professional satisfaction, which shows the importance of the emotional component of social services work. Research suggests that the emotional rewards of work can compensate for some material deprivations when associated with a sense of meaningfulness and recognition [16].

The remuneration and motivation of employees in social services is a multidimensional problem that includes both financial and non-financial factors. While salary increases were identified by respondents as a key motivator, benefits, work environment, workplace relationships and the emotional rewards of working with clients form an important complement to financial aspects. Therefore, to improve working conditions and retention, it is necessary to focus on comprehensive support including material, social and emotional dimensions of motivation.

Appreciation from employers, colleagues and families - Appreciation of the work of social service workers is essential for their motivation, satisfaction and long-term retention in the profession. Workers who care for people living with dementia perceive appreciation as an important source of professional fulfilment, especially in the form of recognition and interest from supervisors, colleagues and clients' families. These forms of emotional appreciation contribute not only to creating a friendly atmosphere in the workplace, but also to improving the quality of care provided to clients.

Key forms of appreciation: Appreciation from employers - respondents emphasised the importance of recognition and concern from supervisors. For example, through regular questions on job satisfaction or positive feedback. This type of recognition creates a sense that their work is valuable and visible. Regular delivery of positive feedback from management reports higher level of satisfaction and engagement of employees [21]. In addition to verbal recognition, symbolic forms of recognition, such as public thanks or awards for exceptional performance, can also be important.

Friendly relationships in the workplace - Friendly and supportive relationships between colleagues were perceived by respondents as one of the key factors for appreciation. Sharing experiences, teamwork and mutual assistance contribute to a positive atmosphere in the workplace. Research shows that organizations that promote teamwork and friendly relationships in the workplace have lower employee turnover rates and higher overall productivity [22].

Feedback from client families - Feedback from client families also plays a significant role in emotional appreciation. Respondents reported that being thanked by families for their care has a strong positive impact on their professional satisfaction. The social services workers' rate appreciation from clients and their families was identified as a key factor in increasing their sense of meaningfulness in their work [23].

Emotional appreciation as part of professional fulfilment - Overall, respondents emphasized that emotional appreciation - including recognition of their work, positive feedback, and concern for their personal and professional well-being - is a key source of professional fulfilment. The emotional appreciation can mitigate the effects of workload and contribute to long-term stability in demanding professions such as social services [24].

The importance of emotional appreciation - Appreciating the work of social service staff is not just a matter of individual motivation but also has a wider impact on the quality of services provided. When staff are regularly recognised, they are motivated to provide better care and create positive relationships with clients. Emotional recognition also promotes the prevention of burnout syndrome and increases their overall well-being.

Appreciation from employers, peers and client families is a key element of support for social service workers. Various forms of recognition, whether it is feedback, a supportive workplace atmosphere or recognition from client families, contribute to their motivation and sense of meaningfulness at work. Organisations should actively promote a culture of recognition and appreciation to ensure greater employee satisfaction and stability.

Joint events and teamwork - teamwork and joint activities play a key role in the effectiveness and satisfaction of social service workers.

Some respondents stressed the need for more joint events to strengthen relationships not only between staff in each facility but also with management. Teamwork and sharing experiences were rated as important for overall job satisfaction. Teamwork is any activity in which different people actively contribute their skills to achieve a single goal. It is not important whether they sit together in the same office or work remotely. Each member of the team has something to offer; they communicate together and face obstacles that arise. They are not afraid of looking for alternatives and experimenting appropriately or pointing out things that may cause problems [25]. The collaboration between people in the process of accomplishing a task is what makes the work effective. When teamwork becomes the foundation of any project, it is truly amazing to see how the results are affected. Any workplace or online workspace that fosters a spirit of collaboration (whether teammates are remote or in the same location) creates an environment that facilitates success [26]. Collaborative events such as team building activities, training sessions, or informal meetings can strengthen relationships between employees and management. These activities promote open communication, building trust and better understanding among team members. The result is increased job satisfaction and efficiency.

The data were analysed through thematic analysis - A validated coding process that identified the main categories and subcategories related to the research objective. The coding process was conducted in two phases: the first coding identified the main themes, while the second phase validated their significance through triangulation by two independent analysts. Through open coding, the data were broken into separate parts and studied carefully. The interviews were then coded and categorized. The same level of generality was applied when choosing code categories. Through open coding, the data were separated into distinct parts and examined carefully. Afterwards, the interviews were coded and categorized, and the same level of generality was applied to the codes. The list of categories and codes (sub-categories) is given in Table 1.

Table 1. List of categories and codes (subcategories)

Category (Main theme)	Code (Subcategory)	Explanation / Example
1. Employer support	Benefits	Drinking plan, benefit cards
	Material facilities	Modern buildings, quality work environment
	Management access	Open communication, approachability
	Support for professional development	Training programmes
	Psychosocial support	Supervision, counselling
2. Remuneration and motivation	Financial evaluation	Salary increase
	Benefits	Meal vouchers, leisure benefit cards
	Informal awards	Verbal recognition from management
	Pleasant working environment	Kitchen, relaxation areas
	Long-term motivation encouragement	Award programmes
3. Appreciation from others	Feedback from clients and their families	Thank-you letters, verbal expressions
	Recognition among colleagues	Sharing experiences, informal praise
	Team belonging	Collegial support, group identity
	Emotional support	Relationships in the workplace
	Sharing successes	Celebrations, team meetings
4. Joint actions and teamwork	Teambuilding activities	Trips, training, informal events
	Sharing experiences	Workshops, peer exchanges
	Joint events with management	Informal meetings with leaders
	Strengthening team relationships	Informal collaboration spaces
	Promoting interdisciplinary collaboration	Sharing across departments/facilities

Source: own investigation

The choice of qualitative research and semi-structured interviews stems from the need to deeply understand the subjective experiences of social service workers caring for clients with dementia. This approach captures complex phenomena like emotions, fatigue, burnout, and coping strategies, which standardized quantitative tools cannot address. Semi-structured interviews offered flexibility to adapt to respondents' unique circumstances, enriching the data set.

The interviews were conducted in a neutral café near the participants' workplaces, ensuring a comfortable and private environment. All respondents declined the option of conducting interviews at their facilities. Initial general questions fostered trust and created a relaxed atmosphere. Particular attention was paid to phrase questions neutrally, to avoid implied answers or misunderstandings.

The interviews lasted an average of 75 minutes, were electronically recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim to preserve accuracy.

The research sample consisted of ten social service workers in residential homes with special regimes, focusing on clients with dementia. The sample included seven women and three men, reflecting the gender distribution in the sector. Their experience ranged from two to ten years, with varying educational backgrounds-from basic education with a qualifying course to a bachelor's degree.

The study's deliberate sample selection aligns with [27] recommendation for targeted research designs. This diversity of qualifications and experience highlights the challenges and strategies in dementia care, offering valuable insights for improving support and training for social service workers (Table 2).

Table 2. Graphical representation of respondents' characteristics

Conversation partner	Gender	Education	Age	Length of experience in soc. services	Length of experience in social services with clients with dementia
KP1	woman	Secondary education with a high school diploma, social worker course	28	5 years	5 years
KP2	woman	Secondary education with a diploma, social worker course	24	4 years	4 years
KP3	men	Basic education, social worker course	42	8 years	5 years
KP4	men	Secondary education with a diploma, social worker course	55	4 years	3 years
KP5	woman	Secondary education with a diploma, social worker course	29	3 years	3 years
KP6	woman	Secondary education with a high school diploma, social worker course	36	6 years	6 years
KP7	men	Bachelor's degree in social work	39	10 years	8 years
KP8	woman	Secondary education with a diploma, social worker course	27	2 years	2 years
KP9	woman	Secondary education with a high school diploma, social worker course	48	7 years	5 years
KP10	men	Basic education, social worker course	51	5 years	4 years

Source: own investigation

Ethical issues and researcher ethics are fundamental to research practice. Researchers should follow their conscience, generally accepted ethical norms, and established standards that define ethical guidelines in research. Adherence to research ethics aims to prevent conflicts among researchers, participants, and third parties, such as publishers or research administrators. Morality entails behaving in line with generally accepted practices, combining sensitivity, consideration, and common sense [28].

Research must respect security, anonymity, and privacy. Sharing personal information, knowing it may be published, can be challenging for some respondents. It goes beyond anonymity to protecting their privacy. Personal data should remain confidential unless the respondent explicitly wishes to be quoted. If participants are easily identifiable, researchers must inform them about potential implications of publishing the data.

Before the research began, verbal consent was obtained, and respondents were informed about how their data would be handled and its purpose. Maximum anonymity was ensured to protect identities, and respondents were free to decline participation at any time, though no one chose to do so.

The researcher must mitigate risks and safeguard all participants, guided by ethical codes and personal integrity [29]. All interview materials were securely stored to prevent unauthorized access. These measures reflect a commitment to ethical research practices, ensuring respondents' trust and protecting their rights while maintaining the integrity of the research process.

Given the amount of data/information found, but also given the scope this test, the interpretated responses/information/positions or ideas here are either of professional interest or represent the majority of responses toa given question/topic.

First category - Support provided by the employer: Employer support plays a vital role in the working lives of social services staff, particularly those caring for people living with dementia. The demanding nature of the profession places high demands on the mental resilience and overall satisfaction of workers, which is reflected in their need to perceive support from management. As the respondents' accounts show, employers provide a range of benefits and material advantages, but employees also identify areas that could be further developed.

The importance of benefits and material facilities as a form of employee support is reflected in the responses of several respondents. For example, conversation partner KP1 perceives employer-provided benefits as a key factor contributing to his overall satisfaction:

"Definitely yes. We have different benefits, which I think is great. The employer tries to offer something extra. For example, we have a drinking plan - coffee, juice, water - which is appreciated especially during longer shifts. In addition, we can take advantage of various programmes and activities that contribute to our work and personal well-being."

Conversation partner KP2 confirms the importance of benefit programmes, while also highlighting their use in leisure time:

"In terms of support, I see it as a big plus that we have a client card to the pharmacy where we get discounts on medicines and vitamins. In addition, we have a benefit card that we can use for various leisure activities - for example, sports or culture. This seems to me to be a very good support, because you can compensate for work stress with an activity that you enjoy."

Conversation partner KP5 emphasises not only benefits but also material facilities as a factor that contributes to a positive working environment:

"There is certainly support from the employer. A lot of it is about material equipment. We have a beautiful building, which is not a given, and I think that when you work in a modern, clean and pleasant environment, it reflects on your mood and attitude to work. So, I definitely appreciate that."

This statement is confirmed by conversation partner KP4, who perceives the quality of the working environment as an indicator of employer interest in their employees:

"We are working in a new building and I think it really shows. The environment is beautiful, spacious, well-equipped and you can see that the employer is trying to provide us with the best conditions. It makes you feel that your work is valued."

Another key element of employee support is the helpful attitude of management and the possibility of informal communication with supervisors. This is reflected in the response of conversation partner KP1, who positively evaluates the openness and willingness of supervisors to listen to employees:

"I think the friendliness is really high. If we have a problem or an idea for improvement, we can always discuss it with our superiors. You come in, say what's bothering you, and you know they'll listen. That's very important to me personally."

Conversation partner KP6 then focuses on the communication aspect, which he believes contributes significantly to a good working atmosphere:

"They ask us a lot how we are, how we like our work, if everything is OK. It's not just about work stuff, but also everyday things in life. It's nice when managers talk to us as people, not just as employees."

This approach creates a sense of trust and positively influences overall employee satisfaction.

Although staff appreciate the existing forms of support, some would like to see even more employer involvement, particularly in the form of organised joint events, but they want more management involvement in day-to-day practice. Conversation partner KP8 describes its view on this area as follows:

"What I would definitely appreciate would be if more joint events were organised. Right now, it's more like we're talking mainly within our team, but if people from the head office could come and spend a day with us and really talk to us, that would be really nice. I think it would strengthen the team spirit and show that the employer really cares about us."

This observation suggests that although staff are somewhat satisfied with the current conditions, certain aspects of support could be further developed, particularly in the area of strengthening team cohesion.

Second category - Remuneration and motivation of employees

The remuneration and motivation of employees in social services are key factors influencing their satisfaction, performance and long-term retention in the field. Based on the data obtained, it is clear that workers caring for people living with dementia often perceive their financial remuneration as insufficient, and that a pay rise would be a major motivating factor for them. Nevertheless, employees also reflect other aspects of motivation such as benefits, quality working relationships, and emotional satisfaction from working with clients.

The vast majority of respondents said that their financial remuneration is not sufficient in relation to the demands of the work they do. Conversation partner KP1 describes his situation as follows:

"Our work is physically and mentally demanding. Every day we care for clients with dementia, which requires not only professional skills, but also a huge amount of patience and empathy. Yet our wages are at the lower end. If I could choose one thing that would help me stay in this job long term, it would definitely be a pay rise."

Conversation partner KP3 makes a similar point, stressing the importance of a higher valuation of the profession:

"When I see how much effort we put into taking care of clients every day, and then I compare our pay to other professions, sometimes it really demotivates me. Caregivers deserve fair compensation that matches the demands of our work."

Conversation partner KP5 points out that low financial compensation is often the reason why some colleagues leave:

"A lot of people love the job, but they don't last long because of the pay. And that's a shame. We have a great team, but we are still struggling with colleagues leaving for better-paying jobs. That then puts even more pressure on those of us who stay."

Although the majority of respondents identified the level of wages as a problem, some also appreciated the existence of benefits that help to facilitate their daily functioning. Conversation partner KP2 positively evaluates the various benefits provided by the employer:

"Although I would have liked a higher salary, I have to appreciate that we have some benefits that make our lives a little easier. For example, we have food stamps, which is nice. We also have a benefit card that we can use for sports, wellness or cultural events. That's definitely a nice change."

Conversation partner KP4 mentions the importance of non-financial benefits, such as drinking or the possibility of using relaxation rooms:

"My employer tries to make our work more pleasant. We always have coffee, tea and water, which may seem like a small thing, but we really appreciate it during long shifts. In addition, we have a rest area where we can relax for a while. I see this as a sign of concern for our comfort."

One of the most frequently mentioned non-financial motivational elements was the atmosphere at the workplace and relationships between colleagues. Conversation partner KP3 stresses the importance of team cohesion:

"I think if I didn't have such great colleagues here, I might have left a long time ago. We support each other, we help each other and we know that we are not alone. Teamwork is key for us and makes me feel like it makes sense to continue this work."

KP9's conversation partner, who also values client relationships, feels the same way:

"As challenging as this job is, I remind myself every day why I do it. Clients give us feedback, sometimes just a smile, sometimes a thank you, and that's a big motivator for me. When I see that I have helped someone, it gives me a sense of purpose."

Another important aspect of motivation was the working environment. Conversation partner KP4 describes his view of the workplace facilities and their impact on work comfort:

"We work in a modern building, we have quality tools and technology, which makes our work much easier. I remember when I used to work in another facility, it was much more difficult because there was a lack of basic equipment. Here I feel that the employer is trying to create the best conditions for us."

Conversation partner KP2 mentions the importance of resting facilities:

"Apart from the work itself, I appreciate the fact that we have nice facilities - a kitchen where we can take a break and changing rooms that are clean and well equipped. It may not sound like a major thing, but in practice it makes a big difference."

Third category - Appreciation from colleagues and families: Appreciation of employees' work in social services plays a crucial role in their motivation, professional fulfilment, and overall satisfaction. Carers of people living with dementia often perform mentally and physically demanding work that requires not only professional skills but also a high level of empathy and patience. It is therefore important for them to feel that their work is meaningful and that it is valued not only by the organisation's management, but also by colleagues and clients' families.

Respondents often stressed that recognition from their superiors is an important source of motivation and professional satisfaction. Conversation partner KP1 describes his experience with the attitude of his superiors as follows:

"When a manager comes to us once in a while and tells us that he appreciates our work, it means a lot. It doesn't have to be anything big, just a simple 'You're doing a great job, we appreciate you'."

A similar view is shared by conversation partner KP3, who values feedback from supervisors:

"I like the fact that our management sometimes gives awards to employees who have distinguished themselves in some way. We recently got a thank you for handling a complicated situation with a client, and it felt great. It makes you want to try harder when you see that your work is not overlooked."

However, some respondents said they would like to see more recognition and more involvement of management in day-to-day operations. Conversation partner KP5 adds:

"Sometimes I feel that the management doesn't know how demanding this job is. If they would take more interest in what's going on in the field from time to time, and maybe just come and say thank you in person, that would be great. We often hear criticism, but positive feedback is sometimes lacking."

Support and appreciation from colleagues also play an important role in employee motivation. A friendly working environment and mutual cooperation create an atmosphere in which employees feel comfortable and want to stay at work. Conversation partner KP2 describes his experience:

"Our team is like a family. When we have a hard day, we support and encourage each other. Sometimes it just takes a simple 'You did well' to make the day a little better."

Conversation partner KP4 highlights the importance of mutual recognition among colleagues:

"When I see a colleague going the extra mile or handling a challenging situation, I try to appreciate it. And the same goes the other way around - when someone tells me I've done a good job, I'm happy about it. Little things like that help us stay motivated."

This element of appreciation contributes not only to the psychological well-being of employees, but also to improving the overall atmosphere in the workplace, as confirmed by research on teamwork.

Appreciation from the families of clients is also of great importance to employees, who often perceive it as the strongest source of professional fulfilment. Conversation partner KP3 describes one of the moments that gave him motivation:

"I remember one family who brought us a letter saying how much they appreciated our work and care for their mother. It was so touching that we had tears in our eyes. It's moments like that when you realize that what we do is truly meaningful."

Conversation partner KP5 describes a similar experience:

"Occasionally, someone from a client's family will come to us and tell us how much we helped them. Those are the times when I feel this work is important. Yes, it doesn't pay well, it's challenging, but when I see the gratitude in the family's eyes, I know it's worth it."

Conversation partner KP1 adds a look at small gestures of appreciation:

"Sometimes families will bring us just a small chocolate or say thank you when they leave. It's not about those things, it's about the feeling that someone sees what we do and appreciates it."

Fourth category - joint actions and teamwork: Teamwork and joint activities are key factors influencing the effectiveness, motivation and satisfaction of social service workers. Working with people living with dementia is physically and mentally demanding, so it is important that staff can rely on mutual support and sharing of experiences. As the responses from respondents show, good teamwork and regular meetings not only strengthen relationships between colleagues but also improve communication with management and contribute to an overall better atmosphere in the workplace.

A number of respondents (specifically 9 people) said that they would appreciate more joint activities that would contribute to stronger relationships between staff and greater team cohesion. Conversation partner KP1 describes his experience of the current situation as follows:

"I think it would be great if there were more events where we could meet colleagues from other departments or even other facilities. Most of the time we only know our close work team, but the opportunity to meet other colleagues would definitely help to work better together."

KP5's conversation partner sees it similarly and would like to see more involvement of the leadership in these activities:

"We've had a couple of joint events, but mostly it's just been within our team. It would be nice if the management would get more involved - maybe spend an informal day with us, talking to us and seeing how we work. I think it would help better relationships and understanding."

This view is confirmed by conversation partner KP3, who sees the benefits of such activities not only in building relationships but also in the opportunity to share experiences:

"We often solve the same problems, but everyone has to solve them themselves. If we had more opportunities to get together and discuss how colleagues do things, we could learn a lot from each other. Sharing experiences could help us in our daily work."

Most respondents agreed that good teamwork is one of the most important aspects of their work. Conversation partner KP2 describes the atmosphere in the team as follows:

"Without good colleagues, this job would be much harder. It's important that we help each other, if someone is overloaded, we try to balance it. When you know someone is behind you and supporting you, you work better right away."

A similar view is shared by conversation partner KP4, who stresses the importance of good communication:

"When something happens, we have to be able to talk to each other. Open communication is essential. There's no point in blaming each other or arguing - rather we try to find solutions. And I think that makes our work more effective."

Conversation partner KP3 then adds insight into the importance of being able to make work more enjoyable:

"Sometimes we just need to lighten up our day. Even during the shift, we try to find moments when we can relax, laugh or just have a normal chat. I think that's also part of the teamwork - that we don't feel like robots, but like people working together and supporting each other."

3. Results

The main aim of this research probe was to analyse the perception of support and appreciation by social service workers who provide care to people living with dementia. The research focused on identifying specific forms of support, motivation, and reward that contribute to job satisfaction, performance, and long-term retention in the profession.

Based on the thematic analysis of the interviews, it can be concluded that support and appreciation play a crucial role in the job satisfaction of social service employees. The key aspects emerging from the data can be summarised in the following points:

1. The importance of employer support - Employers play a key role in ensuring employee wellbeing and motivation. While respondents appreciated the benefits available, the quality of the work environment and open communication with supervisors, they also identified areas for improvement, particularly in the organization of joint activities and greater management involvement in day-to-day operations.
2. Insufficient financial remuneration as a barrier to motivation - All respondents agreed that financial remuneration does not match the difficulty of their work. Although benefits and a positive work environment compensate for this shortfall to some extent, an increase in pay would be a major motivating factor leading to reduced turnover and higher job satisfaction.
3. Appreciation as a key factor of professional identity - Appreciation from management, colleagues and client families contributes significantly to work motivation. Regular positive feedback, informal recognition and gratitude are perceived as important elements in promoting a sense of meaningfulness at work. In particular, appreciation from client families was a strong source of professional satisfaction for staff.
4. The need to develop teamwork and joint events? - Respondents expressed a desire for greater involvement in collective activities that would strengthen relationships among colleagues and with management. Joint events, team building, and informal meetings could contribute to better team cohessivness, foster sharing of experiences, and overall improve job satisfaction.

The overall results of the survey pointed out that although existing forms of support contribute to employee job satisfaction, there is still room for improvement. Recommendations arising from the research include the introduction of systematic employee recognition, improved financial rewards and the strengthening of teamwork through regular joint activities. These changes could lead to greater stability in the work team and improve the quality of care provided.

4. Discussion

Based on the results of the research probe, several key recommendations for practice can be formulated that could help to increase job satisfaction among social services staff, reduce turnover, and improve the quality of care for people living with dementia. These recommendations are based on the main findings of the research and reflect the areas identified by staff as key to their professional satisfaction and long-term retention in the field.

1. Strengthening financial incentives and non-financial benefits
   - Reconsideration of the pay policy so that wages better reflect the demands of work in social services.
   - Introduction of financial reward systems for long-term practice and superior performance.
   - Expansion of benefit programmes, for example, to include education allowances, discounted insurance, or leisure activities.
   - Ensuring access to material benefits such as quality work aids and ergonomic equipment.
2. Developing a culture of appreciation and feedback
   - Introduce a regular staff recognition system (e.g., monthly or quarterly awards for contribution to client care).
   - Actively providing positive feedback from supervisors, not only during formal appraisals but also during daily work.
   - Create a space for sharing successes and mutual appreciation among colleagues, for example through team meetings or thank you boards.
   - Encouraging informal expressions of appreciation from client families, for example by collecting feedback to be given to staff on a regular basis.
3. Promoting teamwork and joint activities
   - Organisation of regular teambuilding activities to strengthen relationships between employees.
   - Engaging management in informal meetings with employees to deepen communication and trust.
   - Support working groups where employees can exchange experiences and address common challenges.
   - Creating a space for sharing good practice between facilities, for example through thematic workshops or online platforms.
4. Improving the working environment and psychosocial support
   - Investment in modernising the working environment with an emphasis on employee comfort and safety.

- Strengthening the availability of professional supervision and psychological support for employees working in difficult conditions.
- Introducing flexible working conditions, such as the possibility of changing shifts to allow employees to better balance their personal and professional lives.
- Support for education in the prevention of burnout and stress management.

The introduction of these improvements could increase the motivation and satisfaction of employees, support the stability of the work team, and contribute to the provision of better-quality care provided to clients of social services. Consistent implementation of these recommendations could also lead to a reduction in staff turnover and make the social work profession more attractive.

5. Conclusion

A research probe focused on the perception of support and appreciation by social service workers providing care to people living with dementia. The research confirmed that these aspects play a crucial role in their job satisfaction, motivation, and long-term retention in the profession. In particular, staff valued the attitude of management, informal communication, quality working environment, and benefits. However, it also identified several areas that could be improved.

The most important finding is that employees perceive their financial compensation as inadequate given the physical and mental demands of their work. Although non-financial benefits can partly contribute to increased job satisfaction, respondents clearly identified pay increases as a key factor influencing their motivation and retention.

Another important area is the need for systematic employee appreciation by employers, colleagues and client families. Positive feedback and informal recognition are essential for professional fulfilment and help prevent burnout. Further, employees stressed the importance of teamwork and joint activities that would contribute to better team cohesiveness and improved communication with management.

Based on these findings, practical recommendations were formulated such as to strengthen financial motivation, develop a culture of appreciation, promote teamwork, and improve the work environment. The implementation of these measures could significantly contribute to the stabilisation of staff in social services, increase their professional satisfaction, and ultimately improve the quality of care for people living with dementia.

The results of this study underline the importance of a comprehensive approach to supporting staff in social services. It highlights the need not only for material security, but also for psychological and social support. These are key to retaining skilled and motivated workers in this demanding but extremely important profession.

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